SOUNDTRANSIT

August 24, 2005

Dr. Michael Meyer
Chairman, Expert Review Panel and
Professor of Civil Engineering
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PO Box 0355
Atlanta, GA 30332

Dear Dr. Meyer,

Thank you very much for your letter of June 23, 2005 providing key preliminary findings from the Expert Review Panel (Panel) on the technical analysis supporting Sound Transit's (ST) Regional Transit Long-Range Plan. Thank you also for allowing John Howell, Panel Administrator, to present the findings to us in a briefing to the ST Board on June 23, 2005. In that way, the Panel's comments were part of the record before the Board adopted the Long-Range Plan on July 7, 2005. Boardmembers were pleased that the Panel found that, generally, ST's analytical methods and results were reasonable.

Your letter raises several important points. This letter will speak to each in the order presented. I hope I am able to adequately respond to each item or clearly let you know how Sound Transit will address each item in the future. Please let me know if you have any questions.

1. Ridership Forecasting

Parking cost growth rate assumed in the ridership model --- As we indicated at your April meeting, for ongoing travel demand modeling supporting development of the ST2 Plan, Sound Transit has lowered the future parking costs to a 1.5% annual growth rate. This aligns with the historic growth rate of 1.6% from 1960 to 2000. We no longer rely on the higher 3% growth rate assumption, which the PSRC and the region had previously used to model auto parking costs and policy issues.

2.5 minute peak period headways for trains in the downtown Seattle transit tunnel, following implementation of a Bellevue-to-Seattle light rail line --- The 2.5 minute headway results from the general assumption made during development of the systemwide, regional Long-Range Plan. It is a long-term maximum frequency goal that will likely not be approached in the nearer term. Currently, the signal system that will operate in the tunnel when the Airport Link system comes on-line has been designed for a 90-second peak headway, so we do not believe the 2.5 minute headway in the model presents a concern. However, we will revisit the

overall transit tunnel headway, capacity and signal system issue as more detailed analysis occurs during development of the ST2 Plan, and, throughout any detailed project-level planning that occurs during environmental analysis and preliminary engineering of the Bellevue-to-Seattle line, should light rail technology be chosen by the Board.

Model network assumption that light rail extending to Northgate is a base condition --- The model network assumptions were established as part of the supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) process for the Long-Range Plan. Those assumptions were made consistent with the requirements of both the state and national environmental policy acts (SEPA/NEPA). The final SEIS describes in more detail why the No Action Alternative includes as a base condition all of the elements of *Sound Move,* including light rail to Northgate. For additional details, please see sections 1.5.1, 3.4.1 and 4.9.2 of the final SEIS.

In addition, the final SEIS qualitatively evaluates variations of the No-Action alternative using light rail interim termini short of Northgate. The interim termini evaluated were at Roosevelt Station, Brooklyn Station and the University of Washington station. The analysis concludes that using the interim termini would result in lower light rail ridership. If the scope of the No Action Alternative were reduced (by using the interim termini instead of Northgate) this would increase the relative impacts of the Plan Alternative and Options (while also increasing their benefits). Nonetheless, the type and nature of those impacts would be similar to the impacts evaluated in the SEIS. For additional details, please see section 1.7 of the final SEIS.

Validity of both LRT and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) for further study in the I-90/East King County corridor --- On July 7th, emphasizing the importance of reliability and a dedicated right of way, the ST Board included both rail-convertible BRT and LRT in the I-90 Corridor in their adopted Long-Range Plan. They also identified some additional studies to be conducted over this summer/autumn. The Board may select a single technology at a later point during the development of the ST2 Plan.

Re-examination of modes in the I-5 Corridor north of Northgate --- In June, ST released an Issue Paper re-examining BRT and LRT as options in this corridor, north of Northgate, and that report has been transmitted to the Panel. The results of that Issue Paper were presented to the ST Board of Directors on June 23, 2005, and they considered that information as they designated the I-5 North corridor as a potential (future) rail extension in addition to the continued operation of HOV/BRT services in the corridor.

2. Cost Estimating

Requirement for further engineering to develop higher confidence in cost estimates --- Following adoption of the LRP, conceptual engineering is resuming on all candidate projects for inclusion in ST2. This engineering is focusing on developing more detailed and broadly understood project definitions, as experience has shown ST that unclear project scope greatly increases the risk of cost increases during project development. During August, 2005 ST will transmit a DRAFT conceptual capital cost estimating methodology to the Panel for review. Like the engineering, itself, a prominent feature of the cost estimating will be the connection to project scope enhanced by the application of lessons-learned from ST's experience in constructing a large number of transit projects in recent years.

Order of magnitude cost estimate for the Tacoma-West LRT corridor --- The LRP now includes this corridor as a potential rail extension. We strongly agree that the early cost estimate needs further refinement. If identified as a priority project by the ST Board, conceptual engineering of this LRT corridor will proceed during 2005, and ST will apply the cost estimating methodology referred to above.

Cost estimates for I-405 interchanges --- ST appreciated the Panel raising the question of the appropriateness of ST including and bearing the entire cost of full highway interchange reconstruction when only certain ramps would be required to mimic comparable LRT service. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and ST revisited this issue and dramatically revised the costs assumed for the BRT option, reducing the cost by $2B to a new range of $2.5B to $3.5B. We agree this makes for a fairer comparison between BRT and LRT in our East King county subarea. WSDOT and ST also jointly prepared a memorandum (June 3, 2005) publicly explaining the reasoning for these changes, and that memo was forwarded to members of the Panel. Beyond a strict BRT/LRT comparison, however, there remains approximately $1B in additional costs for HOV freeway-to-freeway connections to provide a complete system for HOV/BRT on the eastside.

3. Network Integration

Appropriateness of looking at both SR-520 and I-90 transit ridership when evaluating high capacity transit (HCT) modes on I-90 --- ST agrees that from a systems perspective, it is appropriate to examine the daily transit volumes across Lake Washington (which serves as a natural barrier between the East King county and Seattle) when evaluating alternative HCT investments. This was done in the Trans-Lake Washington Study conducted between 2000 and 2002. Having examined transit performance on SR-520 and I-90, that study concluded that I-90 should be the first bridge on which HCT is implemented. Accordingly, our current

planning and evaluation focuses on selecting the best HCT investment to connect Bellevue and other East King County communities with Seattle via I-90.

4. Engineering Feasibility

Operations of LRT across the I-90 floating bridge during severe weather --- For now, ST assumes that WSDOT will close the bridge to transit use under the same conditions that warrant the bridge's closure to auto and truck traffic during severe weather. If LRT becomes the locally preferred HCT mode, project-level engineering will include detailed analysis of this question. There isn't sufficient information available at the current conceptual stage of project development to reasonably draw any other conclusions. As the Panel may be aware, later this summer, WSDOT will conduct the heavy-truck test to simulate LRT operation on the bridge. That test, while not intended specifically intended for this purpose, may shed some light on the question of foul weather operations.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to respond to the Panel's findings. We look forward to future comments by the Panel and an ongoing constructive relationship.

Sincerely,

Joni Earl
Chief Executive Officer

ATTACHMENT: Memorandum: HOV/BRT Freeway interchange Costs (June 3, 2005)

Copies: The Honorable Christine Gregoire, Governor
Representative Edward Murray
Douglas B. MacDonald, Secretary of Transportation
Senator Mary Margaret Haugen
Members of the Expert Review Panel
John W. Ladenberg, Sound Transit Board Chair
Sound Transit Board of Directors
Bob Drewel, Executive Director, Puget Sound Regional Council